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Report of the Peacebuilding Commission mission to Guinea-Bissau, 16-21 January 2010

1. A delegation of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, headed by Regina Maria Cordeiro Dunlop, Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, on behalf of the Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration, visited Bissau from 18 to 20 January 2010. The delegation included Alfredo Lopes Cabral, Permanent Representative of Guinea-Bissau to the United Nations, and delegates appointed by regional groups, namely: General Alassane Massouhoudou (Benin), Francisco Vaz Patto (Portugal), Federico Perazza (Uruguay), Ewa Anzorge (Poland), Cedrick Crowley (South Africa), Hyung Chul Park (Republic of Korea) and Alexandre Nina (Brazil). The visit was supported by the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) and Peacebuilding Support Office staff.[1]

2. The purpose of the visit was to: (a) reiterate support for engagement with the Government of Guinea-Bissau and key national and international stakeholders; (b) assess jointly with stakeholders progress made in the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding; (c) confirm priorities identified for the near future, based on the conclusions and recommendations contained in the review of the Strategic Framework; and (d) exchange views on possible broad areas of support by the Peacebuilding Fund in its second allocation to the country.

3. The delegation met with the President of Guinea-Bissau, Malam Bacai Sanha; the Prime Minister, Carlos Gomes Junior; the Speaker of the Parliament, Raimundo Correia; the Minister for Foreign Affairs; the Ministers of Defence, Economy, Education, Public Administration Reform and Justice; members of the Parliament (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde and Social Renewal Party), as well as representatives of the international community based in Bissau, the United Nations country team, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the African Development Bank and civil society. The delegation also met

[1] Aboubakar Saibou and Tunga Ganbold accompanied the delegation from the Peacebuilding Support Office. Rui Flores, a Peacebuilding Support Office officer in Bissau, provided critical support and facilitated the visit.

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with the National Steering Committee. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Joseph Mutaboba, lent his support to the work of the delegation.

4. Many interlocutors highlighted the progress that had been achieved in the consolidation of peace after the successful holding of parliamentary and presidential elections in 2009. Efforts by the Government to maintain fiscal stability and pursue public administration reform were also highlighted. The fact that the Government had normalized the payment of civil servants, with domestic resources, and had approved the 2010 budget on time (for the first time in recent history) were cited as important achievements. The Government had been able to adopt relevant legislation pertaining to security sector reform, complete the census of the defence and security forces and reactivate the National Steering Committee on security sector reform. Government officials also reiterated their commitment to fighting corruption and impunity and referred to the letter addressed to the Secretary-General requesting support for a national commission of inquiry into the 2009 assassinations.

5. As most stakeholders noted, however, there were many challenges that had yet to be addressed in all of the priority areas. While the notion of country ownership was highlighted as an indispensable element for the success of the peacebuilding process, the international community was called upon to enhance its support to the country. In this connection, the Government informed the delegation about the technical work under way for the preparation of a round table of donors. There was also great expectation that a second allocation of Peacebuilding Fund resources would be announced without delay in order to provide catalytic support in critical peacebuilding areas.

6. From the frank and productive exchanges with all interlocutors in the country, the delegation noted that the priorities included in the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding, as well as in its review documents, remained valid. The elements emphasized are set out below.

National dialogue and reconciliation

7. All stakeholders, including the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament, stressed the importance of a national reconciliation dialogue involving all sectors of society. To that end, the Government, together with civil society organizations, was planning a national conference, to be held in June 2010. The event would be preceded by a series of regional forums throughout the country. On the basis of similar successful experiences in other countries, such as Benin, Togo, Rwanda and South Africa, the conference would allow for an inclusive dialogue and produce specific recommendations on how to overcome past divergences, prevent conflicts and pave the way to peace and development. The Peacebuilding Commission was asked to support the initiative and to assist the Government in mobilizing resources for the organization of the conference.

Security sector reform

8. According to the Government, all relevant legislation on security sector reform had already been adopted by the Council of Ministers, although most of it was pending legislative approval. The Speaker of the Parliament expressed his intention to hold an extraordinary legislative session to approve the security sector reform package. There was also unanimous recognition of the fact that a broader approach

to security sector reform was necessary, taking into consideration aspects related to the socio-economic challenges faced by the country. In this connection, a critical measure yet to be addressed concerned the creation of reintegration schemes for the military to be demobilized. The need was also noted to pursue security sector reform in tandem with reforms in the justice sector. The Government had hired, with United Nations Development Programme funding, a consultant who would elaborate a communications strategy for security sector reform.

9. The launching of a pension fund for the military was systematically referred to as the most urgent security sector reform priority. The Government was also considering the creation of a similar fund for the security forces. Projects related to both funds were expected to be presented at the upcoming round table of donors. The Government informed the delegation about the constitution of working groups to develop detailed projects on security sector reform, to be brought to the attention of donors on that occasion.

10. Various stakeholders singled out the need for effective coordination among international partners involved in security sector reform and recognized the European Union as an important partner in that area. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General expressed confidence that UNIOGBIS would contribute to enhancing coordination in the sector, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1876 (2009). To that end, UNIOGBIS would conduct a detailed evaluation of capacity needs in the area of security sector reform once the additional staff and experts had joined the Office. It was suggested that a two-day seminar could take place in Bissau to increase awareness among stakeholders on the security sector reform process.

Measures to revitalize and jump-start the economy

11. Interlocutors emphasized the need to create an enabling environment for the private sector in order to jump-start the economy. The Government was engaged in reducing the number of days necessary for the opening of new businesses in the country. There was a great demand for microcredit schemes, especially on the part of women and youth. Important infrastructure bottlenecks had yet to be addressed, particularly in the energy sector.

12. The World Bank continued to assist the Government in providing generators. While work continued on the Gambia River Basin Development Organization (OMVG) hydroelectric project, the Government planned to develop alternative sources of energy, including solar energy. A suggestion was made for the Guinea-Bissau Water and Electricity Company to be privatized, and distribution services liberalized. The African Development Bank, which has a wide portfolio of projects in the country, would consider the inclusion of energy as one of the areas to be contemplated under its 2011-2014 strategy plan to be agreed upon with the Government.

13. The Government's efforts towards fiscal stability and public administration reform were recognized by most interlocutors. The head of the IMF mission visiting the country referred to ongoing negotiations with the Government, which were aimed at upgrading the current emergency post-conflict assistance programme into a medium-term programme. Such a programme was expected to pave the way for the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, which was seen as a crucial step for releasing resources to address socio-economic needs.

Social issues relevant to peacebuilding

14. Government authorities highlighted the mounting challenges in the education sector: more than half of the population was illiterate and current resources were insufficient to cover the salaries of teachers on a sustainable basis. The Government adopted an educational policy chart in October 2009, the country's first piece of legislation in the education sector, which was pending final approval at the National Assembly. The most immediate priorities referred to the creation of literacy centres and the distribution of learning material. In the health sector, it was noted that, thanks to significant investments and public campaigns, Guinea-Bissau did not experience a cholera epidemic similar to the one that had hit the country in 2008. The need for investments in sanitation was much emphasized, in view of the direct impact poor sanitation had on child mortality rates. Civil society representatives stressed the issue of child trafficking to neighbouring countries.

The fight against drug trafficking

15. Despite the declining trend in drug seizures in Guinea-Bissau, interlocutors pointed to the changing nature of drug trafficking in the region: drugs were being processed in clandestine laboratories in the country, and local consumption had reportedly increased. It was brought to the delegation's attention that drug traffickers continued to operate in the Bijagós islands, which made addressing the strengthening of the judicial police an imperative issue, to be addressed as a matter of priority. There were also rumours of possible linkages between drug cartels and terrorist groups in Western Africa. A suggestion was made for the Government to review its current asset recovery legislation in order to allow the judiciary police to promptly make use of equipment seized from drug traffickers. The Commission was invited to take an active part in the West Africa Coast Initiative, including in its upcoming ministerial meeting to be held in Freetown in February. The Government was considering the construction of a prison facility in the capital, with a capacity for 500 prisoners. It was suggested that a technical assessment of the prison sector in Guinea-Bissau be made before the launching of the project.

Conclusions

16. The exchanges between the Government and other stakeholders revealed that the priorities included in the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding remain valid, as do the conclusions and recommendations of the framework review process. In particular, the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission will be required in 2010 as follows:

(a) The National Steering Committee will prepare a revised priority plan for the allocation of a second tranche of Peacebuilding Fund resources, based on the priorities of the Strategic Framework and taking into account lessons learned from the first allocation of funding. The Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration intends to launch a discussion as a means of contributing to that process;

(b) The Commission should consider extending its support to the holding of a national reconciliation dialogue in June;

(c) The Commission is invited to contribute to the fight against drug trafficking, particularly through the engagement of regional initiatives, such as the West Africa Coast Initiative;

(d) The Commission will maintain a dialogue with international financial institutions and other stakeholders and continue to mobilize resources to address the country's development needs;

(e) The launching of the pension fund for the military is seen as a matter of utmost priority, to which the Commission could contribute through the mobilization of resources;

(f) The Commission could also assist the country in the preparations for a round table of donors. A suggestion was made for the discussion of projects to be presented to be associated with ongoing talks on a second allocation of Peacebuilding Fund resources.

17. In conclusion, the delegation expressed appreciation to the Government, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Joseph Mutaboba, and UNIOGBIS staff for facilitating the visit.